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AUTHOR	Mangino, Evangelina; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Written in a question-answer format, this report describes the impact of the Austin Independent School District graduation requirement on students. (1) What are the minimum competency requirements (MCR) for graduation? Students must demonstrate reading and mathematics competencies at the 9.0 grade equivalent. (2) How many 1984-85 graduates have met the MCR for graduation? Ninety-one percent met the reading MCR, 93 percent met the mathematics MCR, and 90 percent met the total reading and math MCR. (3) Have the requirements had any effect on student achievement? There are yearly increases in the percentage of seniors demonstrating competency. (4) What are the characteristics of graduates who signed letters of waiver? Common characteristics include: never taking a tutorial course, more are Black, more are males, average age is half-a-year older than other graduates, and a significant number were classified special education or limited-English-proficient students. (5) What changes in the MCR program were made in 1984-85? The program would not apply to graduates after 1985-86 due to a new state mandate (House Bill 72). (6) What changes need to be made in 1985-86? Students in grade 11 in 1985-86 must pass both the language and mathematics exit-level tests to receive a diploma. (PN)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION MINIMUM COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS

Authors: Evangelina Mangino, Rick Battaile, and Wanda Washington

Other Contact Persons: Glynn Ligon and David Doss

The Austin Independent School District requires that all students graduating before 1986-87 have skills in reading and mathematics equivalent to a ninth-grade level or above. Special education students who cannot be validly tested are exempt from the requirements. Students who have not met the requirements may graduate if their parents sign a letter of waiver. This report describes the impact of these requirements on students.

Major Positive Findings:

1. Of the 3,187 high school graduates in 1984-85, the percentage who met AISD's minimum competency requirement was...

   - 91% in reading,
   - 93% in mathematics, and
   - 90% in both reading and mathematics.

2. These percentages are similar to 1984-85 levels--with a 0.6 percentage point increase of students meeting both reading and mathematics competency requirements.

Major Findings Requiring Action:

1. Many graduates signed waiver letters without having taken a tutorial course. Of all students who signed a reading letter, 51% never took a reading tutorial. Of all students who signed a mathematics letter, 77% never took a mathematics tutorial. Many other students signed a letter of waiver after one tutorial rather than enrolling in additional tutorial courses.

2. New policies and procedures mandated by House Bill 72 are being implemented, including TEAMS exit-level testing for students in grade 11 in 1985-86 and thereafter. The curriculum must be revised to prepare students to pass the TEAMS exit-level test (given in grades 11 and 12), including developing remedial instruction focusing on TEAMS exit-level objectives.

WHAT ARE THE MINIMUM COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS FOR GRADUATION?

To graduate from an Austin ISD high school in 1984-85, a student must have demonstrated reading and mathematics competencies equivalent to average achievement at the beginning of ninth grade (9.0 grade equivalent). If this minimum competency level is not achieved, a letter of waiver which states that the student understands that competency standards have not been met must be signed by the parent or guardian of the student. Tutorial courses in both reading and mathematics are provided to help students attain competency levels. To enroll in these tutorial courses, a student must have completed four semesters of reading/language arts or earned two units of credit (four semesters) in mathematics but have not met competency in the subject. At least one tutorial is required prior to signing a waiver letter, except for limited-English proficient (LEP) students whose English language proficiency is below the level required to benefit from the tutorial. Only special education students who cannot be validly tested are exempt from these requirements. Prior to 1982-83, the minimum competency criterion was the 8.5 grade equivalent.

Because students enrolled in grade 11 in 1985-86 and thereafter must pass a State exit-level test (the TEAMS - Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills) in order to receive a diploma, in April, 1984 the School Board ruled that AISD'S minimum competency requirements now apply only to students who will graduate in 1985-86 or earlier.

The evaluation of the program includes administering tests, maintaining records, assessing procedures, and evaluating the impact of the minimum competency requirements.

Students still under AISD's minimum competency requirements could meet them as eighth graders on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS), in grades 9-12 on the Sequential Tests of Educational Progress (STEP) (given prior to 1983-84) or the Tests of Achievement and Proficiency (TAP) (given beginning in 1983-84), or on the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS). Once each fall and once each spring, special administrations of Austin's Basic Educational Skills Test (Austin's BEST) have been conducted to determine which students must enroll in a tutorial course the next semester. Austin's BEST has also been administered during the final examination period in the tutorial courses.

Procedures for the testing and reporting are documented in the Policies and Procedures Manual: Minimum Competencies for High School Graduation, publication number 82.13. Details of the testing results and analyses are included in the Systemwide Evaluation: 1984-85 Technical Report (Volume I), publication number 84.20.

HOW MANY 1984-85 GRADUATES MET THE MINIMUM COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS FOR GRADUATION?

- Reading: 91% met the competency requirement.
  6% signed a letter of waiver.
  3% could not be tested validly because of a handicapping condition (special education).
- Mathematics: 93% met the competency requirement.
  4% signed a letter of waiver.
  3% could not be tested validly because of a handicapping condition (special education).
- 90% met competency requirements in both reading and mathematics.

	1980-81		1981-82		1982-83*		1983-84*		1984-85*	
Number of Graduates Who...	3322	100%	3233	100%	3408	100%	3152	100%	3187	100%
Met Min. Comp. Req. in Both Areas	3119	94%	2908	90%	3010	88%	2832	90%	2880	90%
Signed at Least One Letter	122	4%	191	6%	254	8%	186	6%	208	7%
Used at Least One Sp. Ed. Exemption	81	2%	134	4%	146	4%	135	4%	99	3%
Met Min. Comp. Req. in Reading	3148	95%	2960	92%	3046	89%	2862	91%	2908	91%
Signed a Letter in Reading	94	3%	148	5%	222	7%	162	5%	184	6%
Used a Sp. Ed. Exemption in Reading	80	2%	125	4%	140	4%	128	4%	95	3%
Met Min. Comp. Req. in Mathematics	3177	96%	3018	93%	3162	93%	2941	93%	2977	93%
Signed a Letter in Mathematics	67	2%	91	3%	105	3%	83	3%	115	4%
Used a Sp. Ed. Exemption in Mathematics	78	2%	124	4%	141	4%	128	4%	95	3%
Met Min. Comp. Req. in at Least One Area	3206	97%	3070	95%	3196	94%	2971	94%	3005	94%
Signed a Letter in Both Areas	39	1%	48	1%	73	2%	59	2%	91	3%
Used a Sp. Ed. Exemption in Both Areas	77	2%	115	4%	137	4%	121	4%	91	3%

*1982-83, 1983-84, and 1984-85 graduates had to meet a 9.0 grade-equivalent criterion compared to 8.5 for prior years.

Note: Two 1982-83 graduates and one 1983-84 graduate were sp. ed. exempt in math only and signed a reading letter, consequently, the data may not add up exactly.

Figure 1: COMPETENCY STATUS OF GRADUATES, 1980-81 to 1984-85

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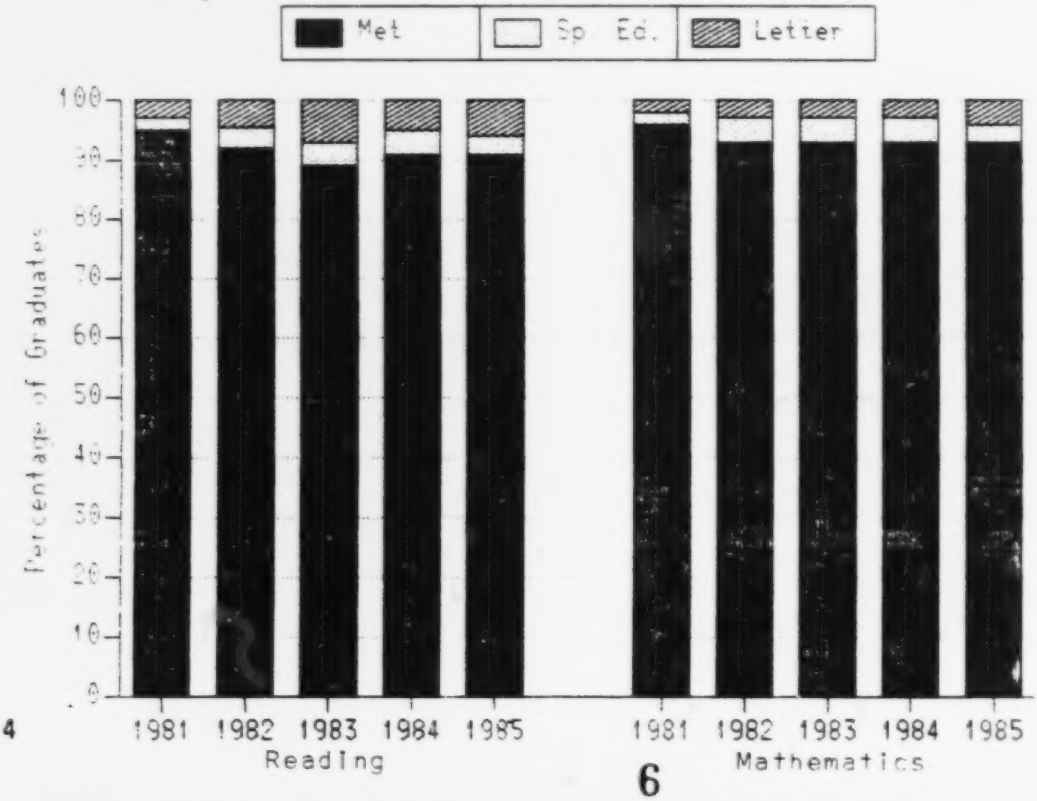
Of the 3,187 students who graduated during the 1984-85 school year, 2,880 (90%) met minimum competency requirements in both reading and mathematics. Those not meeting both requirements included special education students who were not testable (99, 3%) and students signing a letter of waiver (184, 6% in reading; 115, 4% in mathematics).

A higher percentage of graduates signed letters of waiver while a lower percentage of graduates used special education exemptions in 1984-85 than in 1983-84.

- 0.7 percentage point more students signed a reading letter of waiver.
- 1.0 percentage point more students signed a mathematics letter of waiver.
- 1.2 percentage point fewer students used a special education exemption.

Figure 1 compares this year's graduates with those from previous years. Figure 2 graphically presents the percentage of students meeting minimum competency requirements, signing letters of waiver, and using special education exemptions over the past five years. Figure 3 (pages 8 and 9 in this publication) presents graduate data by school for the past five years. When interpreting these data, keep in mind that students graduating after 1981-82 had to meet the 9.0 rather than the 8.5 criterion.

Figure 2: COMPETENCY STATUS OF GRADUATES, 1981 TO 1985



HAVE THE MINIMUM COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS HAD ANY EFFECT ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT?

- A higher percentage of seniors has demonstrated competency at or above the 8.5 grade equivalent every year since 1977-78 (before any competency requirements became effective).
- A higher percentage of seniors has demonstrated competency at or above the 9.0 grade equivalent every year since 1981-82 (the year before the 9.0 requirement became effective).

Test Results

If the minimum competency requirements have had an influence on student achievement, a decline in students in the lowest percentile ranges on the high school achievement test (the TAP beginning in 1983-84, the STEP prior to 1983-84) should be evident. Unfortunately, because the TAP and STEP are so dissimilar in many ways (i.e., norming procedures, norms available, and tests administered), no meaningful comparison of data can be made over the 8 years of testing. However, through 1983 when the test changed, there had been a small decline in the proportion of very low achievers in mathematics (as measured by the STEP) since the minimum competency requirements became effective. Low achievers in reading represented the same percentage of graduates in 1983 as they did in 1978.

When comparing performance on the 1985 and 1984 TAP, a positive trend is evident. In reading, the percentage of students scoring in the lowest quartile (at or below the 25th percentile) in 1984-85 was between 4 and 7 percentage points less than the 1983-84 percentages at the same grade. In mathematics, the range over grades 9-12 was between 1 and 4 percentage points less than in 1983-84.

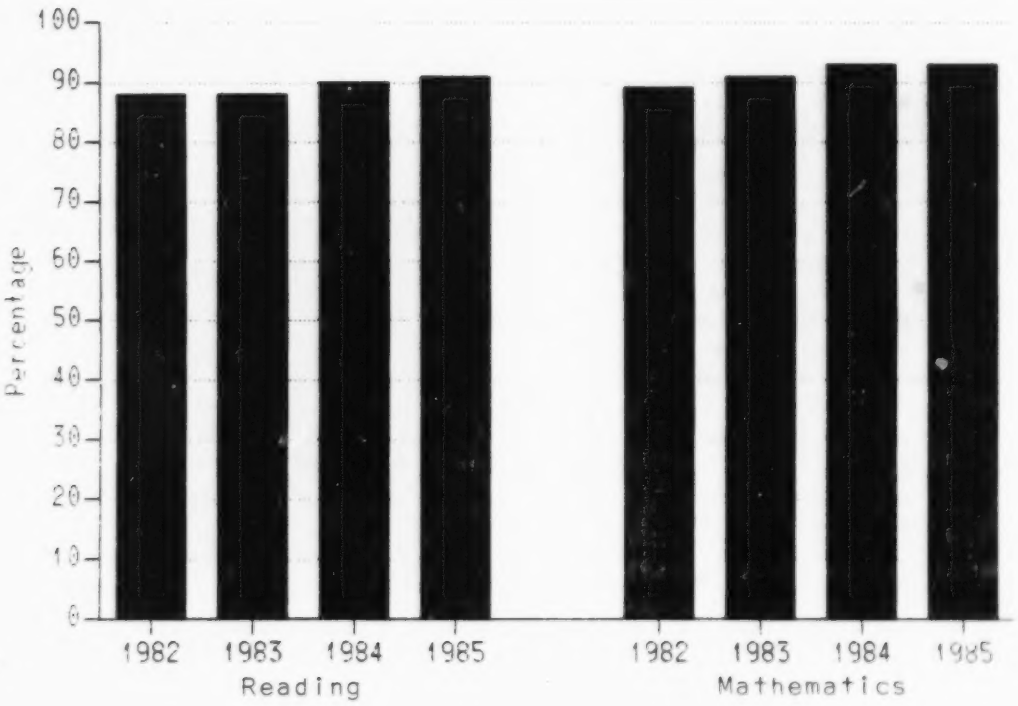
There has been an increase compared to 1978 (prior to any requirements) in the percentage of high school seniors who have demonstrated minimum competency skills at or above the 8.5 level prior to graduation. When the competency requirement was raised to 9.0, more students began meeting that higher standard (see Figure 4). More students appear to meet a higher criterion when it affects their graduation status.

Two factors seem to have influenced these noticeable increases.

- Marginal students retake the competency tests multiple times, thus increasing their chances of making higher scores.
- Tutorial courses offer instruction specific to the skills being measured by the competency tests.

As an outcome of this focused tutorial instruction, graduates do appear to have better mastery of a set of basic skills.

Figure 4: PERCENTAGE OF SENIORS MEETING THE 9.0 CRITERION, 1982 THROUGH 1985



WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF GRADUATES WHO SIGNED LETTERS OF WAIVER?

The 1984-85 graduates who signed letters of waiver had these characteristics.

1. Most graduates who signed waivers never took a tutorial course.
   - 93 in reading (51% of all students signing a reading waiver)
   - 88 in mathematics (77% of all students signing a mathematics waiver)

2. Of the 184 graduates who signed reading waivers, 54 (29%) had taken two or more reading tutorials. Of the 115 graduates signing mathematics waivers, only 14 (12%) took more than one tutorial.

3. More are Black (37%). Fewer are Hispanic (31%) or Anglo/Other (32%).

4. More males than females signed waiver letters. Of the students signing waiver letters in reading, 54% are male. In mathematics, 58% are male.

5. Graduates who sign waivers average almost half-a-year older than other graduates.

6. A significant number of students who signed a waiver letter had been classified as special education or limited-English proficient (LEP) students for all or part of the time they were enrolled in high school in AISD:

	Special Education		LEP	
	Reading	Math	Reading	Math
Students in program	90	81	25	9
Students never in program	94	34	159	106
Total number of students signing letters	184	115	184	115

84.59

	Year of Graduation	Total Number of Graduates	Graduates Meeting Both Reading and Math Competency		Graduates Meeting Reading Competency		Graduates Meeting Math Competency	
			#	%	#	%	#	%
ADULT LEARNING CENTER	80-81	15	15	100.0	15	100.0	15	100.0
	81-82	23	23	100.0	23	100.0	23	100.0
	82-83	94	94	100.0	94	100.0	94	100.0
	83-84	78	78	100.0	78	100.0	78	100.0
	84-85	127	127	100.0	127	100.0	127	100.0
ANDERSON	80-81	398	375	94.2	377	94.7	384	96.5
	81-82	335	310	92.5	311	92.8	325	97 0
	82-83	334	299	89.5	301	90.1	314	94.0
	83-84	349	315	90.3	318	91.1	324	92.8
	84-85	359	343	95.5	345	96.1	346	96.4
AUSTIN	80-81	384	378	98.4	383	99.7	378	98.4
	81-82	345	331	95.9	333	96.5	335	97.1
	82-83	413	382	92.5	386	93.5	399	96.6
	83-84	303	280	92.4	282	93.1	288	95.0
	84-85	296	281	94.9	281	94.9	285	96.3
CROCKETT	80-81	526	507	96.4	509	96.8	510	97.0
	81-82	512	481	93.9	491	95.9	488	95.3
	82-83	538	492	91.4	496	92.2	508	94.4
	83-84	501	468	93.4	469	93.6	482	96.2
	84-85	478	442	92.5	444	92.9	457	95.6
LBJ	80-81	323	298	92.3	299	92.6	304	94.1
	81-82	294	264	89.8	269	91.5	276	93.9
	82-83	271	240	88.6	246	90.8	250	92.3
	83-84	285	264	92.6	269	94.4	267	93.7
	84-85	239	205	85.8	208	87.0	217	90.8
JOHNSTON	80-81	267	243	91.0	252	94.4	249	93.3
	81-82	315	280	88.9	290	92.1	290	92.1
	82-83	321	269	83.8	274	85.4	289	90.0
	83-84	326	287	88.0	290	89.0	298	91.4
	84-85	325	287	88.3	290	89.2	296	91.1
LANIER	80-81	341	320	93.8	324	95.0	323	94.7
	81-82	347	304	87.6	314	90.5	313	90.2
	82-83	358	309	86.3	313	87.4	326	91.1
	83-84	321	276	86.0	283	88.2	292	91.0
	84-85	374	338	90.4	343	91.7	349	93.3
MCCALLUM	80-81	390	368	94.4	370	94.9	376	96.4
	81-82	319	288	90.3	291	91.2	295	92.5
	82-83	310	286	92.3	290	93.5	295	95.2
	83-84	286	258	90.2	259	90.6	271	94.8
	84-85	289	262	90.7	268	92.7	274	94.8
REAGAN	80-81	311	291	93.6	293	94.2	297	95.5
	81-82	329	283	86.0	287	87.2	304	92.4
	82-83	329	281	85.4	286	86.9	296	90.0
	83-84	295	243	82.4	245	83.1	260	88.1
	84-85	269	235	87.4	237	88.1	247	91.8
ROBBINS	80-81	1	1	100.0	1	100.0	1	100.0
	81-82	17	11	64.7	15	88.2	11	64.7
	82-83	21	18	85.7	18	85.7	19	90.5
	83-84	33	24	72.7	27	81.8	27	81.8
	84-85	27	23	85.2	24	88.9	24	88.9
SPECIAL SCHOOLS*	80-81	11	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	81-82	18	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	82-83	17	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	83-84	0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	84-85	25	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
TRAVIS	80-81	355	323	91.0	325	91.5	340	95.8
	81-82	379	333	87.9	336	88.7	358	94.5
	82-83	402	340	84.6	342	85.1	372	92.5
	83-84	375	339	90.4	342	91.2	355	94.7
	84-85	379	337	88.9	341	90.0	355	93.7
TOTAL	80-81	3322	3119	93.9	3148	94.8	3177	95.6
	81-82	3233	2908	89.9	2960	91.6	3018	93.3
	82-83	3408	3010	88.3	3046	89.4	3162	92.8
	83-84	3152	2832	89.8	2862	90.8	2942	93.3
	84-85	3187	2880	90.4	2908	91.2	2977	93.4

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Figure 3. Graduates Meeting Reading and Mathematics Minimum Competency Requirements, By School, 1980-81 through 1984-85

* Graduates of "Special Schools" (e.g., Mary Lee) were reported independently prior to this year. Beginning in 1983-84, except for Clifton Center, those graduates from special schools are reported within regular high school populations.

Note: 1982-83, 1983-84, and 1984-85 graduates had to meet a 9.0 grade-equivalent criterion compared to 8.5 for prior years.

HOW SUCCESSFUL HAVE THE TUTORIAL COURSES BEEN IN HELPING STUDENTS ATTAIN MINIMUM COMPETENCY LEVELS?

- Of the 1984-85 graduates who took at least one tutorial course, the percentage who met competency requirements prior to graduation was...
  - 74% in reading, and
  - 87% in mathematics.
- In 1984-85, the average percentage of students who met minimum competency requirements at the end of a tutorial course was...
  - 35% in reading, and
  - 69% in mathematics.

Semester Success Rate

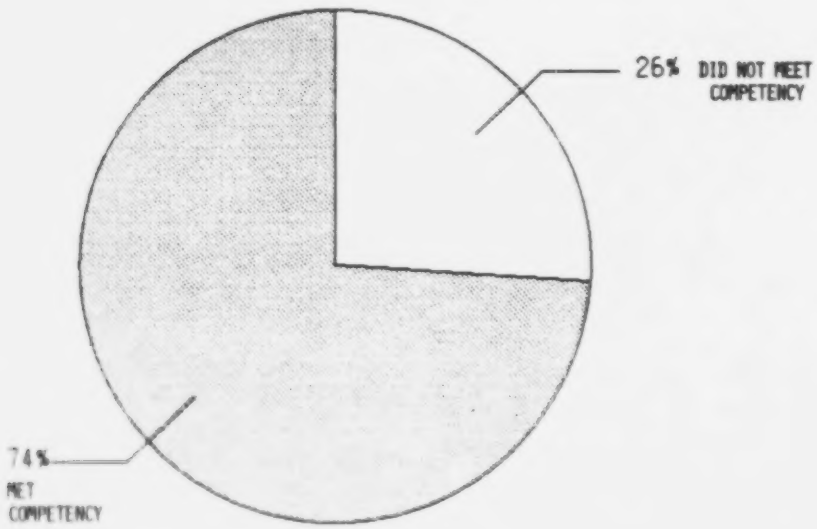
A competency test is administered at the end of each tutorial course. In addition, current 11th and 12th grade students may demonstrate competency on the TABS or TAP during the spring semester. An estimate of the success of the tutorials can be obtained by inspecting the percentage of students who demonstrate mastery during the semester they are enrolled in a tutorial course. This success rate for the reading tutorial course was 37% in the fall and 33% in the spring of 1984-85. The success rates for mathematics tutorials were much higher--68% in the fall and 70% in the spring.

Overall Success

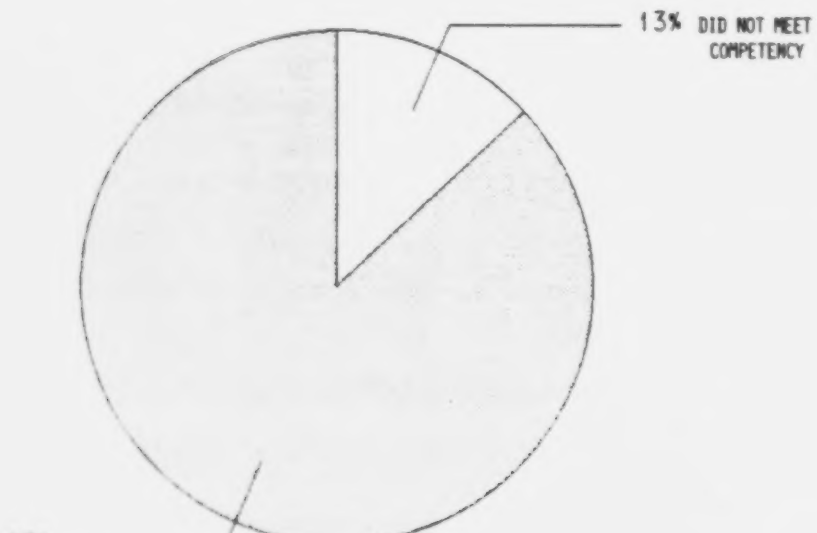
The ultimate goal of the tutorial courses is to bring every student up to (or above) the minimum competency level. Of the 1984-85 graduates, 8% took at least one tutorial prior to demonstrating competency in reading, compared to 6% in math. The tutorial courses have clearly played a role in the attainment of minimum competency levels by some graduates. However, even after taking at least one tutorial, some students never met the minimum competency requirements.

Overall, 74% of the 1984-85 graduates who took at least one reading tutorial met reading competency, as compared with 77% of the 1983-84 graduates. Of the 1984-85 graduates who took at least one mathematics tutorial, 87% met mathematics competency, as compared to 91% in 1983-84. Figure 5 illustrates the 1984-85 percentages.

Figure 5: PERCENTAGE OF 1984-85 GRADUATES WHO TOOK AT LEAST ONE TUTORIAL AND MET COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS



Reading



Mathematics

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WHAT CHANGES IN THE MINIMUM COMPETENCY PROGRAM WERE MADE IN 1984-85?

- On April 8, 1985, the School Board ruled that, because of new State regulations, AISD's minimum competency requirements would not apply to students who graduate after 1985-86.

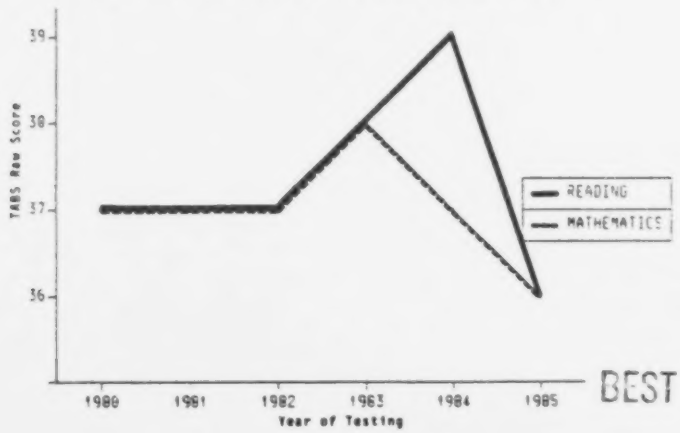
House Bill 72, passed in June, 1984, mandates that students enrolled in grade 11 in 1985-86 and thereafter must pass the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS) exit-level test, administered in grades 11 and 12, in order to receive a diploma. Consequently, the School Board identified students graduating in 1985-86 as the last students required to meet AISD's competency requirements.

TABS Minimum Competency Criteria

Annually, the Office of Research and Evaluation equates the TABS with the TAP or STEP to determine the 9.0 criterion because the items on the TABS test change from year to year. In addition, the 1985 TABS contained pilot test items. These were new items being calibrated for future use on the TEAMS which, though not used to determine the student's score, apparently increased the difficulty of the test. Consequently, the 1985 TABS raw score required (out of 44 items on each test) for meeting AISD's 9.0 minimum competency criterion was 36 in mathematics and in reading.

Figure 6 indicates the TABS raw scores required to demonstrate minimum competency at the 9.0 grade equivalent (g.e.) criterion over the past six years. These raw scores were determined by an equating study each year comparing students' performance on the TABS with their performance on the TAP (1984 and 1985) or STEP (1980-1983).

Figure 6: TABS RAW SCORE EQUIVALENT TO 9.0 G.E. ON TAP (1984 AND 1985) AND STEP (1980 THROUGH 1983)



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WHAT CHANGES NEED TO BE MADE IN 1985-86?

- Eleventh graders will be the first to take the Exit-level TEAMS, and these students must pass both the language and mathematics tests before they can receive a diploma.

House Bill 72, passed in July, 1984, mandates that each student enrolled in grade 11 in 1985-86 and thereafter must pass an exit-level test (the TEAMS) in order to graduate. Implementation of this regulation will require a major effort on the part of District central office and campus personnel.

Information must be disseminated to District staff and students about the TEAMS exit-level testing, including training school staff in the coordination and administration (two times per year) of the test and the interpretation of test scores. Score reporting procedures must be developed and implemented to provide a longitudinal districtwide data base for monitoring the progress of each student as well as progress districtwide. Curriculum must be revised as necessary to focus more on the objectives measured by the TEAMS exit-level test, as well as remedial courses developed to assist those students unable to pass the test.

It is anticipated that the TEAMS exit-level test will require a 9.0 grade level criterion in reading and mathematics in order to pass. Figure 7 indicates the percentage of 1984-85 seniors who did not attain different criterion levels on the TAP during grades 11 and 12. Of those students, 24% did not perform at the ninth-grade level or above.

Figure 7 also includes estimates of the future percentages of seniors not mastering the TEAMS exit-level test in both reading and mathematics at different criterion levels. It is estimated that in future years seven to ten percent of the seniors may be denied a diploma due to not meeting a 9.0 grade-level mastery on the TEAMS exit-level test.

These estimates take into account the percentage of students not meeting the different criterion levels on the TAP in 1984-85 as well as the factors listed in page 14.

	Percentage Below Criteria Levels on TAP			Estimate of Percentage Not Mastering TEAMS
Level	Reading	Math	Both Reading and Math	
11.0	34%	29%	40%	12-16%
10.5	31%	26%	37%	11-15%
10.0	26%	20%	32%	10-13%
9.5	23%	19%	29%	9-12%
9.0	19%	14%	24%	7-10%
8.5	15%	10%	19%	5- 8%

Figure 7. ESTIMATE OF PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS NOT PASSING VARIOUS TEAMS EXIT-LEVEL CRITERIA

Several factors must be taken into account when interpreting the data in Figure 7.

- On the TEAMS exit-level test, students will have a far greater incentive to perform at a higher level than on the TAP.
- In grades 11 and 12, students will have four opportunities on the TEAMS, whereas the TAP is only taken twice.
- Curriculum should be focused more towards the TEAMS exit-level objectives than they have been towards the TAP objectives.
- TEAMS remedial courses will have more of an impact than current tutorial courses because of the importance of passing the TEAMS. Schools should be more effective in placing students in remedial courses than they have been under AISD's current minimum competency requirements (e.g., most of the 1984-85 graduates who signed a waiver letter never took the tutorial course in the subject).
- In the future, ARD Committees may designate more special education students as untestable, thereby ensuring they will not be denied a diploma due to not mastering the TEAMS exit-level test.

Bibliography

Related Publications

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION MINIMUM COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS: 1984-85 Evaluation Plan. Austin, Tx.: Office of Research and Evaluation (Pub. No. 84.09), Austin Independent School District, September, 1984.

The evaluation plan is a one-year plan of evaluation work for this project. It provides a brief project and evaluation summary, and identifies the decision and evaluation questions to be addressed, other information needs, and information sources to be used.

POLICY AND PROCEDURES MANUAL: Minimum competencies for high school graduation. Austin, Tx.: Office of Research and Evaluation (Pub. No. 82.13), Austin Independent School District, October, 1982.

This manual is intended to be a complete resource for information pertaining to AISD's minimum competency requirements for high school graduation. It contains the policy and procedures relating to the requirements for graduation, the conduct of the minimum competency testing, and the required reports and record keeping. The manual is revised and updated as necessary to reflect changes in the requirements or the procedures.

SYSTEMWIDE EVALUATION: 1984-85 technical report. Austin, Tx.: Office of Research and Evaluation (Pub. No. 84.20), Austin Independent School District, June 1985.

The technical report, contained in three volumes, describes the instruments and procedures used in data collection and the results of the systemwide evaluation effort. The information presented in Volume I concerns the District's achievement testing and minimum competency testing for graduation. Volume II contains survey results and summaries of District records. In Volume III, information relating to personnel and the District's annual performance is presented.

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DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT INFORMATION
Dr. Glynn Ligon, Director

OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND EVALUATION
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Evangelina Mangino, Evaluator

Data Analyst:
John Fry

Evaluation Associates:
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